

Trial of acid throwers

Tough law must be enforced strictly

IT has long been felt that acid attacks, which have already ruined the lives of so many women, must be contained with much greater determination and a sense of purpose. And pure law and order approach has to play an important role in the fight against this social malady.

Three men have been sentenced to death by a court in Sylhet for throwing acid on a woman. The introduction of the death penalty for acid throwing was necessary, given the unusual rise in the number of this particular crime across the country. Though the latest court verdict is not the first case of death penalty being awarded for acid throwing, it is, nevertheless, an example of the tough law running its full course. The point is relevant since most of the laws in our context do not mean much in practice, as criminals manage to evade them somehow or the other. There are still weaknesses in the law-enforcing mechanism which acid throwers having both money and clout can and do exploit to avoid being brought to justice.

Unfortunately, acid attacks continue despite attempts being made by the women rights advocates and all others concerned to put an end to this beastly crime. And what is particularly worrying is that the weapon is being used these days not only by the frustrated young men against girls, but also by criminals to settle scores on a wide range of disputes. This is a clear indication of criminality assuming a ghastly character.

It hardly needs saying that we have to stop acid throwing which is far from an ordinary crime. The victims with badly deformed faces have to live with the psychological burden of being almost ostracised. So it is a crime with enormous socio-economic implications that can hardly be overlooked.

Many suggestions have been put forward with a view to dealing with the problem. And one of them is that effective measures should be adopted to make sure that acid is not easily available. While it is quite obvious that there will be some appreciable improvement in the situation if the criminals fail to buy or procure acid, but the latest reports have made it clear that purchasing or procuring acid is not a difficult task.

The law enforcers, members of civil society and citizens in general should make concerted efforts to eliminate the menace and thus make the lives of countless women and girls, and other likely targets of acid throwing, a bit safe.

BB scenario

Unruly elements should be reined in

THE way a board meeting of the Bangladesh Bank was foiled on Wednesday last must have caused great consternation to the decision-makers and all those involved in the affairs of the central bank in some capacity or the other.

It was a sort of preemptive strike by the employees who thought that some decision going against their professional interests would be taken at the board meeting. At best, it was a demonstration of the employees being united on professional matters. At worst, it showed that even at the central bank there was little discipline and order.

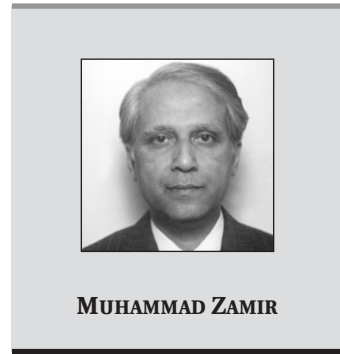
The bank employees were not happy with just chanting slogans against what they termed the government plan to retrench them, but went to the extent of creating chaos and confusion on the bank premises which forced at least three directors to leave the office. Their cars also came under attack.

Rationalisation of manpower, an integral part of modern management, was on the agenda of the board meeting. But the bank employees wanted to make sure that no discussion, much less action, took place on the subject. And they decided to apply physical force to attain their goal.

The central bank of any country, in the present global context, does not operate in isolation, nor can it afford to follow any policy which runs counter to the concept of modern management. It is quite normal for the bank to review the manpower situation from time to time and make necessary adjustments to prevent wastage. But nowhere in the world such scene is created where employees stand in the way of strategic planning needed for the central bank to run smoothly.

The employees of the Bangladesh Bank are seemingly deviating from their designated course of professionalism. However, it is imperative for the authorities to see that the unruly elements are not allowed to dictate terms.

Those other wars



IN the heat generated by the war in Iraq, the world appears to have forgotten for the moment several other conflicts that continue to rage in other fronts. In this context, one has to refer to the unconventional wars that are being waged against international trade in drugs, weapons, people and money. In more ways than one, these pernicious elements are contributing to and playing active roles in the destabilisation of countries and bilateral relationships.

As international inter-action has combined with technology, it has expanded the reach and effectiveness of criminal networks that go beyond national and legal boundaries. It has been noted in this context that while religious zeal or political goals drive terrorists, the promise of enormous financial gain motivates those who battle governments in these five areas. Unfortunately, quick profit and the allure of wealth is as much a motivator for murder and insecurity as religious fanaticism. We are already witnessing within Bangladesh a situation where corruption juxtaposed with illegal Mastan culture is wrecking havoc on the socio-political fabric of the country.

While nation-states have benefited from the information revolution, stronger political and economic linkages, and the shrinking importance of geographic distance, criminal networks have also gone one better. Unfettered by limitations of sovereignty, they are now increasingly free of territorial constraints. Smuggling, in a manner of speaking, has assumed global dimensions today.

Those involved in informal trade have expanded illegal markets and boosted the size and the resources of the criminal networks. By doing so, they have imposed more burdens on governments. The wrangle has been further compounded with demands for a more open environment for international trade and investment.

Taking these international criminals to task has become more complicated because of the inherent cumbersome procedures that guide bureaucracies. Compared to this, the other side, consisting of drug traffickers, arms dealers, alien

smugglers, counterfeiters and money launderers has a significant advantage. They have in place a refined networking and can at every opportunity enter into complex and improbable strategic alliances that span countries, cultures and continents. Their resources -- financial, human, institutional, technological, as deployed by the criminal combatants have 'reached unfathomable orders of magnitude'. So have the numbers of their victims. Superficially, it might appear that it is

Drugs and arms often go together. These two comrades-in-arms always follow a shadowy trail. Most of the roughly 80 million AK-47s in circulation today are in the wrong hands. According to the United Nations, only 18 million (or about 3 per cent) of the 550 million small arms and light weapons in circulation today are used by government, military or police forces. Illicit trade accounts for almost 20 per cent of the total small arms trade and generates more than \$1 billion a year. The enormity

complicated with the actual supply of stolen nuclear, biological or chemical weapons materials and the potential demand for such items and their associated technology from both would-be nuclear powers and terrorists. Constrained supply and increasing demand cause prices to rise and create enormous incentives for illegal activities. Unfortunately, governments have been largely ineffective in curbing either supply or demand. Multilateral efforts to curb the manufacture and distri-

victims are forced into subservience through physical violence, debt bondage and passport confiscation. We have faced this scourge also in Bangladesh. We have seen how thousands of innocent people have suffered in recent years after falling victim to those who run such cartels.

Alien smuggling is a \$7-billion-a-year enterprise and according to the United Nations is the fastest growing business of organised crime. Roughly half-a-million people enter the United States

tion of international flows of money a daunting task." It is anticipated that the imminent, large-scale introduction of e-money -- cards with microchips that can store information about large amounts of money, and thus can be easily transported outside regular channels or simply exchanged among individuals -- will only magnify this challenge.

It is time that we rethought these problems. We need to seriously examine how we can fight these wars and win. I believe that there are four areas where efforts can yield better ideas on how to tackle the problems posed by these wars:

(a) governments probably need to recognize that restricting the scope of multilateral action for the sake of protecting their notion of sovereignty will not always work. It might in fact impede progress in investigation and subsequent apprehending of the guilty parties. It would, for example, greatly reduce irritation if relevant agencies in South Asia could work together in these problem areas without always being apprehensive of compromising their narrow security perceptions;

(b) there has to be strengthening of existing multilateral institutions. This will enable them to be more efficient in the usage of their scarce resources. It will similarly facilitate these organisations to stop the compromising of their officials by criminal networks. In this context it would also be helpful to promote general effective collaboration between law enforcement agencies in different parts of the world and also individual cooperation within specific regions. This would particularly help in apprehending terrorists in South Asia and deny them sanctuary in other neighbouring countries of the region;

(c) analysts probably need to rethink the concept of war fronts as defined by geography. The functions of intelligence agents, police officers, customs agents and immigration officers need re-thinking and adaptation to the new realities; and

(d) we have to encourage governments to be less repressive and more regulatory in their efforts to control free market forces. Market incentives have to be created. This is a better approach than using bureaucracies to curb the excesses of markets.

We must remember that these containment situations are against networks motivated by enormous profit opportunities. Policy makers accordingly have to focus on opportunities where market regulation can ameliorate problems that have defied approaches based on prohibition and armed interdiction of international trade.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

impossible to defeat these foes. However, careful scrutiny will demonstrate there are certain fundamental similarities in the efforts aimed against such criminal activity. Ending such activity will not be achieved only by enhancing the skill set of government combatants. Our efforts should include also the services of those who understand how to use incentives and regulations to steer markets away from bad social outcomes.

The best known of the five wars is, of course, the war on drugs. This is a phenomenon that has also reached every corner of Bangladesh and is today undermining our younger population. 'Phensydyll', 'brown sugar', 'heroin' and many other opiates have afflicted our population. In 1999, the United Nations' "Human Development Report" calculated the annual trade in illicit drugs as being over \$400 billion, roughly the size of the Indian economy, and about 8 per cent of the then world trade. Feeding this habit is a global supply chain that uses everything from passenger jets that can carry shipment of cocaine worth \$500 million in a single trip to custom-built submarines that ply the waters between Colombia and Puerto Rico. I understand that drug smugglers in South Asia are also not behind in their technical expertise. To foil eavesdroppers, drug smugglers are now using 'cloned' cell phones and broadband radio receivers while also relying on complex financial structures that blend legitimate and illegitimate enterprises with elaborate fronts and structures of cross-ownership.

The second disease that is affecting all of us is arms trafficking. We are already aware of the serious consequences that have arisen within Bangladesh because of this problem.

of the problem is better understood when one realises that small arms helped fuel 46 of the 49 largest conflicts of the last decade and in 2001 were estimated to be responsible for 1,000 deaths a day, and that more than 80 per cent of those victims were women and children. The other aspect that creates greater concern is that the price of small arms appear to be falling. Recently it has been pointed out in a meeting in New York that an AK-47, in 1986 cost 15 cows in Kolowa, Kenya. Now, it costs that just four.

However, arms trafficking and the associated illegal market includes more things than just small arms. It also encompasses top-of-the-line tanks, radar systems and nuclear-weapons-usable material. Analysts have pointed out that the scenario is further

bution of weapons are also faltering because some powers are unwilling to accept curbs on their own activities.

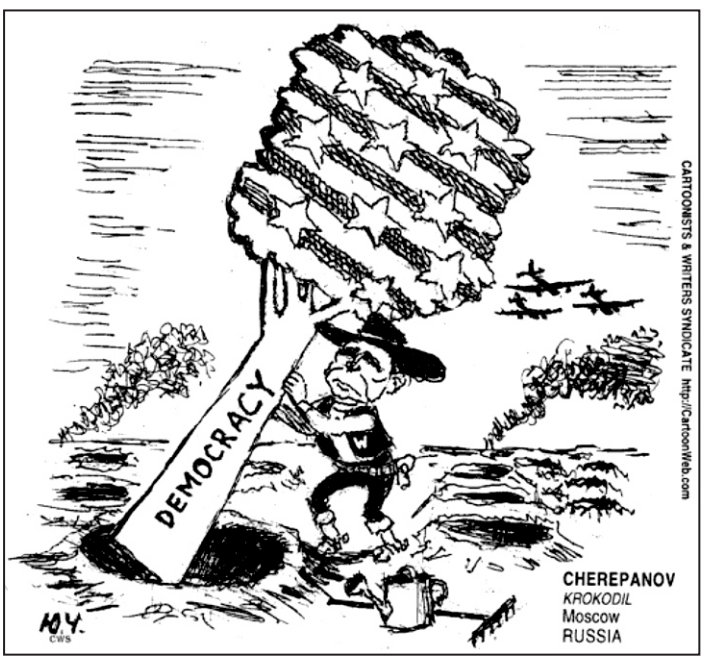
The third affliction that has assumed a serious dimension is 'alien smuggling' which contributes towards illegal immigration, corruption and trafficking in women and children. A Conference held in Brussels recently informed participants that 'a woman can be bought in Timisoara, Romania, for between \$50 and \$200 and "resold" in Western Europe for ten times that price.' The UNICEF has estimated that cross-border smugglers in Central and Western Africa enslave 200,000 children a year. Traffickers initially tempt victims with job offers or adoption by parents in wealthy countries. Subsequently, the

illegally each year. About the same number enter the European Union. Such informal migration has now resulted in more than 150 million living outside their countries of origin.

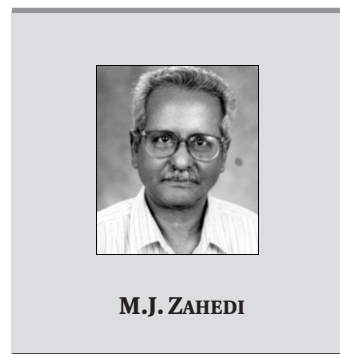
Governments everywhere are enacting tougher immigration laws and devoting more time and money to fight those who take advantage of people's misery.

However, as long as the lure remains of the grass being greener on the other side, this problem is bound to continue. One can even state that illegal immigration attempts from one country to another is an example of people voting with their feet against their own countries.

Money laundering, money smuggling or hundi, whatever be the name is the last source of international concern. It would not be incorrect to state that few (if any) countries can claim to be free of the practice of helping individuals and companies hide funds from governments, creditors, business partners, or sometimes even family members. The United Nations and the World Bank think that estimates of the volume of global money laundering range between 2 and 5 per cent of the world's annual gross national product, or between \$800 billion and \$2 trillion. These are absolutely staggering figures. Suitcases full of banknotes are not the only key means for money smugglers. Computers, the internet and complex financial schemes combine with pseudo-legal and illegal practices to facilitate this process today. Moises Naim has pointed out that "the sophistication of technology, the complex web of financial institutions that crisscross the globe, and the ease with which 'dirty' funds can be electronically morphed into legitimate assets make the regula-



Confidence building measures must be adhered to



INDIA and Pakistan are set for another round of talks. But it will be a different round of talks -- the talks will be with a better perception of the road that has to be trod and the goal that is to be reached. But it is a matter of satisfaction that the debilitating tension has been ended, the wistful theme that the world is a global village has been made to stand on its head with the leaders being the village headmen.

The sequence of events have started with the hand of friendship speech by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. It is a matter of satisfaction that the debilitating tension has ended. The road to normalisation between India and Pakistan is likely to be subdued with all kinds of obstacles. Moving forward does not imply

that the vital interests involved in normalisation process have to be sacrificed to move forward, especially in view of the recent history implies that both parties should be mentally prepared to confront the gradual as the sudden emergence of irritants. In addition, it should not be ignored that hardliners in both the countries would not sit idle. It takes little effort to sabotage constructive outcome of years of

the two countries. It is also recognised by almost everyone that the advent of peace in South Asia is dependent upon Indo-Pak friendship. The two countries have come across the major hurdle but have also caused the advent of much needed thaw, opening the road towards the desired coalition.

What should be done to ensure positive outcome? To begin with both parties should strictly adhere

facilitate the process is strict vigilance on adverse political developments. The best way to deal with this condition is to be kept fully informed with the developments. An additional factor that needs to be subjected serious consideration is to check the unnecessary adverse propaganda against each other. This works both ways. Once the relations improve, the propaganda automatically recedes into the

how best it can be resolved. The matter of cross-border terrorism which India is making much of, even though Pakistan claims it has plugged the infiltrations across the border, can be realistically discussed and agreed approaches can be adopted once the serious and meaningful negotiations start. The fourth condition could be to take the media into confidence in order to ensure that negativism is

existing confidence building measures. It is good that the two countries have agreed to restore their diplomatic representation at the normal level.

There have been certain agreements reached between the two sides but not ratified, such as the one on Siachin. Why can't the two countries sign the agreement in the very first meeting, many people are asking. A memorandum of understanding was signed at the Lahore summit which can be further improved and activated. The two federations of chambers of commerce and industry should be allowed to explore areas of interest. Similarly, sports and cultural exchanges can create lot of difference. Above all the relationship between the countries has to be based on mutuality of interests. And if the differences are sorted out and we decide to live in peace and harmony, the sky is the only limit.

If compromise is at the heart of good neighbourliness, India as the larger nation must be willing and ready to give more for the common good of the South Asian region', to quote from a recent editorial from India's sanest newspaper *The Hindu*.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaleez Times.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The relationship between the countries has to be based on mutuality of interests. And if the differences are sorted out and we decide to live in peace and harmony, the sky is the only limit...'If compromise is at the heart of good neighbourliness, India as the larger nation must be willing and ready to give more for the common good of the South Asian region', to quote from a recent editorial from India's sanest newspaper The Hindu.

hard work. To attack the complex problems require courage, patience, initiative and perseverance.

Without going into the details of the incumbent complex relationship between India and Pakistan, what steps can be undertaken to keep both countries on track? For obvious reasons the underlying assumption is that a vast majority of the people involved are genuinely interested in peace between

to certain conditions. Both sides should approach very cautiously. Instead of indulging in reckless rhetoric, it would be appropriate to move forward cautiously. Statements like the one that had recently been given by the Pakistan foreign minister to an Indian TV channel that both countries should make concerted, consolidated and focused efforts, certainly lend strength to the process.

The second condition that could

background.

The third condition deals with realism. Instead of being idealistic, it would be more appropriate to recognise the ground realities and start moving towards reconciliation and normalisation. It will be unrealistic to begin drumming that there is no Kashmir problem. It would be better to accept the existence of the dispute with complexities that have crept into over the years. The attitude should be

avoided. The power of media these days is indeed unparalleled.

Another condition that could facilitate the dialogue is the announcement that both sides reiterate their commitments to fully and honestly adhere to all the existing confidence building measures, a long list of which exists but of which the adherence level is not impressive. Just before the dialogue starts, both the PMs should reiterate full compliance to the

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

New kind of NGO for USA

I think very few readers will disagree with me that "general" people of USA are almost completely unaware of what is happening outside the USA. They are either unaware or kept uninformed intentionally by their media or corporate world or by their government. Worst of all, sometimes they are "misinformed". I believe that this is one of the main reasons behind the so-called high approval rate for Bush's war on Iraq. In this letter I would like to say that if we could start a new kind of NGO in USA to educate the "general" US people then many problems of this world would be solved.

That NGO would educate the "general" US people what is going on outside USA, what is being hidden from them for long time. That NGO would educate them

about their inconsistent foreign policy, about the history of world politics. If we could do something like that then it will be harder, if not impossible, for US government, corporate America or any other group with evil interest to continue to violate international rules and regulations.

For a starter, all aware people living in the USA can start educating their neighbours and friends little by little-- may be in the form of friendly gossiping, in the form of arranging seminars. Then the NGOs will start arranging bigger seminars and so on.

Mohammad Ali
Mirpur, Dhaka

"Kashmir crisis"

In response to my letter regarding "Kashmir crisis" Mr. Yahya (May 14) has blamed the so-called "Pakistan sponsored terrorism" respon-

sible for keeping Kashmiris from achieving their right of self-determination.

Uprising in Kashmir is now over eleven years old. Close to one hundred thousand Kashmiris are dead and thousands have been injured, maimed, and put behind bars by Indian security forces. India has deployed over seven hundred thousand soldiers in Kashmir valley over a total population of four million people. It is the largest concentration of soldiers in any territory since World War II.

India blames Pakistan for "cross border terrorism". Pakistan has denied sponsoring "cross border terrorism" in Kashmir. India has rejected Pakistan's offer of deploying UN monitors or an international force to monitor and check "cross border terrorism" if any. Pakistan has opened its side of Kashmir to international media to report situation there but India has

banned any foreign media in its side of the Valley.

If this so-called "cross border terrorism" is happening across Line of Control, then why seven hundred thousand strong Indian army has not been able to check it. If "cross border terrorism" is the cause of problem in the Valley then why one hundred thousand Kashmiris have been murdered by Indian army. If terrorists from Pakistan are responsible for killings in Kashmir then why the US has listed Hizbul Mujahideen, which is purely a Kashmiri Organization as acknowledged by Mr. Vajpayee, as a terrorist outfit.

My understanding is that that overwhelming majority of fighters in Kashmir are of Kashmiri origin and only a very small percentage of them come from Pakistan. No movement in the world will last for so long and against such odds without overwhelming local sup-

port.
Jamil Ahmed
Houston, Texas, USA

"A diplomat's letter"

It is meaningless to argue with a person whose country killed innumerable people including children, women and innocent people, destroyed a civilisation, looted its heritage and now eagerly waiting to loot its oil. It is meaningless to argue with a person who says 'what is done is done' (then why do you blame Saddam for what he had done?).

No doubt Saddam was a dictator (and there are many other dictators on this earth, still alive and breathing, whom world police, like Bush or Blair, could not recognise, for reason not known to us), but he was the dictator in his own country. But Bush appears to be the interna-

tional dictator. If Saddam was asked to leave Iraq for being a dictator then for the same reason Bush should also be asked to leave the world alone.

Shawkat Hossain
Mirpur, Dhaka

Clean Dhaka

On my way to office and return, I have been watching a painful scenario everyday and frankly speaking it is getting worst as the days progress. The subject I am presenting on your perusal is I think one of our city's beautiful art work (mural) on north east side of Gulistan underpass tunnel entrance wall and I am sure it was loveable to watch and understand by most.

Now, due to carelessness of our civic sense it is covered by cheap publicity posters and you can

hardly locate it. It has happened due to lack of civic sense plus partly carelessness of our wonderful and great City Corporation.

I would like to suggest the appropriate authority to clean up the mess and let us enjoy the beauty of the mural.

Zillur Rahman
Dhaka

"Mobile phones"

It refers to the letter "Mobile phones" (May 13) by Mr. CNR. I was taken aback to go through such an impractical letter. Isn't the aware of the achievements of his own country? The mobile companies cannot dupe over 1000,000 subscribers. It is incredible that all of them are foolish.

When the leading mobile company is bringing laurel for the country and being awarded the

Business Award 2002 as the best joint venture company, Mr CNR is framing charges against it. There are many losing concern in our country but he is simply not bothered about those.

He accused that in the ads it is never mentioned that "Connection" means "mobile to mobile", I draw his attention towards an ad of GP just the opposite side of his letter (page 3) where it is clearly mentioned "Mobile to Mobile post-paid and pre-paid connection". Is there any gap through which people can be misguided? After all he must realise and admit that GP is not an ordinary enterprise which has to "deceive" people for its "brisk business".

Syeda Farhana Rahman
Rajuk Uttara Model School & College, Dhaka